

Scripture Reading:

Luke 23: “1 Then the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King." 3 Then Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" [Jesus] answered him and said, "It is as you say." 4 So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, "I find no fault in this Man." 5 But they were the more fierce, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place." 6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. 7 And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.”

'Jesus Faces the Romans'

It was just about a year ago, on Ascension Sunday that we studied together the passage from Luke chapter 11 where Jesus is accused of using the power of Satan and confronts the religious leaders in much the same way He did at His trials before the Sanhedrin last week.

- I want to quickly review this passage because I believe we see in Luke's presentation of the three trials in his orderly account how Jesus IS binding the strong man!

Jesus casts out a demon and the crowds marvel. The religious leaders then accuse Jesus of using the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus responds by telling them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?"

Jesus accused them of being hypocrites and then explained what was really going on: "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils."

- As we consider the trials that Jesus faced in His final hours, we must remember that He is now binding the strong man: Overcoming him, stripping away all of his armor and dividing his spoils!

Luke is the only Gospel writer to give the details of the second trial before the Sanhedrin, which we considered last week.

Luke is also the only one to mention the sideshow of a mock trial before King Herod which we will consider next week.

This morning Luke gives a brief account of the first appearance before Pilate.

I would contend that in these trials, which Jesus faces on His path to the cross, He confronts the great enemies of our faith: Our own flesh... the world... and the devil himself.

- In making this case, I hope to dispel this morning some false notions that we might have about how Jesus approached these final hours and the nature of the Kingdom He was establishing.

A few weeks ago we saw the great agony of Jesus in the garden as He considered, from a human standpoint the incredible weight of taking upon Himself the wrath of God that was due toward OUR sins.

We will see this agony come to a climax on the cross when the Savior cries, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me!” This agony is seen in all of the trials as well where Jesus is humiliated and beaten before the Sanhedrin and Pilate and mocked before King Herod.

- BUT, we must also remember that Jesus came at His appointed time as the conquering Savior to bind the strong man as well!

The writer of the Hebrews says we are to look to Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

I believe that as Jesus suffered in these trials He would have remembered the words of Psalm 110 which we will sing in response to this sermon today:

“The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool."
2 The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!”

- And we will be commissioned with the reading and singing of Psalm 2 where the Psalmist asks,

“1 Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed...”

- Jesus would have taken comfort from the promise of the Father in this same Psalm where we read:

7 "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.
8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.”

And Jesus would remember the ultimate end of what He had come to Jerusalem to accomplish:

- He came to save His people from their sins and establish His Kingdom, which means the defeat of all His enemies:

9 “You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' ”

- The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus would in fact bind the strong man

Jesus goes before each of these three trials as the accused, but in the end it is He who puts His accusers on trial and they are found wanting:

- Jesus not only saves us from the penalty due for our sin, but releases us from the power of sin as well.

The strong man is bound and we need no longer fear the great enemies of our faith, the world the flesh and even Satan himself!

Last week we saw that Satan had deceived the very shepherds of Israel, those who should have brought people to the Messiah had set up a false religion and Jesus confronted them as the Son of God.

- Jesus confronted them just as He confronts ALL the false religions of the world and all the desperate efforts of men to save themselves or prove themselves worthy before God.
- Just as Jesus was able to stand against all their false accusations and mocking, so our work of taking the Gospel to the entire world cannot be stopped by ANY religion!

Today we will see Jesus stand before Pilate, the ultimate representative of the world and its powers: The representative of all the Kings of the earth and political forces that want to control men's lives and be their savior instead of God Almighty.

- **Just as Pilate could not stand before Jesus, so we must believe that God will put ALL the enemies of the faith in the civil realm under the feet of Jesus as the Father has promised His Son!**

And next week we will see Jesus before King Herod who represents all the wickedness and deceit of our own flesh. Here again we will see Jesus defeat all the temptations that we face and teach us how to properly respond!

- **Before we consider what happened in this early encounter with Pilate, we must remember the role that the pagan nations had played up until this point in the history of God's people.**

In both our earlier studies here in Luke and the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we have learned that Israel was to have taken the Good News of Salvation to all the nations.

- **The twelve tribes were to have watered and blessed the seventy nations as beautifully pictured by the twelve springs and seventy palm trees that God's people saw when they camped at Elim.**

Instead the people of God turned inward, succumbing to ALL the enemies Jesus is now confronting:

- **They had become a tool of Satan**
- **They were compromised by the world**
- **They had been totally consumed by the passions of their flesh to the point where they sacrificed the covenant children that God blessed them with on the altars of their idols striving for peace and affluence... Just as we do today!**

God judged His people by destroying the Temple and sending them in captivity in Babylon.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we see God keeping His promise that the people would return to the land: We saw the restoration of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem in preparation of the coming of Messiah at His appointed time.

However, we also learn from Daniel, in his interpretation of the King's dream in chapter two and other visions later in his life that there would be great nations who would dominate and guard the people of God until the coming of the Savior.

IF we do not remember all of this background we will not fully understand what is happening in this encounter with Pilate and will fall prey to another of those places where the Bible is greatly misunderstood by the church today!

Remembering this background and the big picture of all three trials, let's dig into our text for this morning...

The Jews had to bring Jesus before Pilate in order to have Him crucified.

- **This was all part of God's great plan of salvation and Pilate will ultimately send the Savior to the cross.**

What we also want to see this morning is that, just as was the case with the Sanhedrin, Jesus also puts Pilate and all the forces of the world on trial here as well, and they are found wanting.

- Luke describes how the religious leaders bring their accusations before Pilate and in the end play what they consider to be their trump card, saying that Jesus rivals Caesar!

They believe that presenting Jesus as who He Himself said He was would be enough to bring a Roman condemnation: **The Christ: A King.** Caesar would have no rivals and Pilate would have to condemn anyone who made such a claim! In fact it is for this reason that so many early Christians were martyred by Rome:

- Not for being religious, but for claiming that Jesus was the King of Kings and refusing to worship Caesar!

So why does Pilate say that he “finds no fault in this man?”

It is actually John who again gives a few more details as we found his account doing with the timeline for the early trials. In John chapter 18 we learn that Pilate took Jesus inside to examine Him further: This was still a public trial, but the Jews did not enter because they wanted to be able to participate in the Passover. Once inside Pilate asks the question reported by all the Gospel accounts: **“Are you the King of the Jews?”**

John gives us the full discussion where we clearly see Jesus putting His accuser on trial: It is here where we must also remember what was shown to Daniel:

- The four great Kingdoms represented in the statue have reigned & now we have come to the time where the rock cut without hands would appear.

Pilate is trying to determine if Jesus is a legitimate threat to Rome, and Jesus is in fact presenting Himself as the King of Kings who will destroy Rome... The Roman Governor does not see this anymore than the members of the Sanhedrin had seen the Son of God who stood before them!

Jesus begins by confronting Pilate about whether he is being a true judge of the matter before him:

John 18: 34 Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?"

Pilate is defensive not wanting to get caught up in some religious argument...

- As we see often see today when the question of whether we are a Christian nation is brought up!

35 “Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"”

- Pilate only wants to know if Jesus is a threat to Rome...

Jesus gives Him a direct answer: He is Rome’s worst nightmare...

36 "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Pilate was concerned that Jesus was another rebel who would oppose Rome: Rome had put down hundreds of rebels and many nations defending their power and would do so again if threatened.

Jesus says He is not like that and Pilate misses the entire point just as many have down through the ages, and especially in America today where few fully understand what Jesus meant when He declared:

“My Kingdom is not of this world!”

- Jesus is not saying that His Kingdom is other worldly, somehow spiritual as opposed to the might of Rome in the worldly sense.
- Jesus is not saying that His Kingdom will have no impact on Rome or any of the other nations of the earth...
- On the contrary, Jesus is the King of Kings who will bring ALL the kings of the earth under His rule, including Rome!

Jesus is telling Pilate that He is the “stone cut without hands” that King Nebuchadnezzar had seen in His dream. Whenever we see that phrase it means something that has been untouched by human hands: Like the stones that made up the altars that Joshua erected by the Jordan river:

[explain this to the children]

- They are meant to remind us that our salvation is ALL of God and not something that we add to or dress up with our own hands

Rome had nothing to fear from any human rebel or even nations at this point in time...

- But they had everything to fear from the King of Kings!
- The stone cut without hands who would establish a Kingdom that would fill the whole earth after smashing the mighty statue!

Just as Jesus clearly presented Himself as the Son of God to the religious leaders...

- He now presents Himself as the King of Kings to Pilate

Pilate misses the whole point and again just wants to know if Jesus is a threat to Rome from a human standpoint:

37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king."

Just as He did with the religious leaders, Jesus then explains what this means for Pilate and Rome:

“For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

- The religious leaders refused to hear or see all the evidences of Jesus being the Son of God, and now Pilate refuses to see or hear “the Word made flesh” who stands before him
- Instead he gives the modern response: “What is truth?”

Once again we see that it is NOT really Jesus who is on trial here:

- Pilate, representing all of the nations of the world now stands condemned for refusing to hear the Word of truth!

As we saw with the religious leaders, Pilate had to make a choice and he chose poorly:

Pilate could have bowed the knee to the King of Kings and become a great Christian leader as King Nebuchadnezzar did after he was humbled by God

Pilate could even have realized the great threat that Jesus presented to mighty Rome and led the battle that many later Caesars waged against the King of Kings... Futile, but at least worthy of some respect

- Or, as was the case, Pilate could have taken the easy way out and decided that Jesus is no real threat...

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

We too must chose and I trust we will chose wisely, bowing the knee to the King of Kings

- NOT siding with those who vainly rage against the King of Kings with their deceptions of evolution, or humanism.
- NOT by taking the easy way out, as is so common today, in saying that the Christian 'world' is different than the world of men and governments, like Pilate did. Saying that we are here to share the Good News, to save a few brands from the fire as the world goes to hell in a hand-basket!

Our calling is to boldly share the Good News like the Apostles and Saints in the Book of Acts:

- There we will see them confront the civil leaders of their day as Paul did in Phillippi.
- And more importantly we will see them proclaiming that Jesus is King of Kings as Paul did on Mars Hill, believing that the Kingdom of Jesus will fill the whole earth which is the hope that the Book of Acts begins and ends with!

Paul writes to Timothy in chapter six of his first letter at verse twelve:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

As you might suspect, Paul is not talking about Timothy's personal confession or his decision card: Not in the least, because Paul continues...

13 "I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate..."

Timothy is to confess that Jesus is the King of Kings just as Jesus did before Pilate...

"that you keep this commandment... [*the commandment to fight the good fight*]

"that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, 15 which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen."

We are not to fear earthy powers and we are not to succumb to the temptations of worldly power:

- Sadly there were many examples of this in the 20th Century with political power wielded in the name of Jesus by the left and the right!

Paul goes on to warn Timothy about another area that can be just as dangerous:

17 "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

What are those good works that we are to do that will keep us safe in the midst of material blessings and stand against the nations of the earth?

I want to encourage us to work on the same list as last week...

A list of things that I suspect we are all still working on...

- I know that I am!

So we can keep working on them as we rejoice that Jesus has delivered us from both the penalty and the power of sin: Remember, we must...

- **Honor all people**
- **Love the brotherhood**
- **Fear God**
- **Honor the King**
- **Submit for the Sake of God**
- **To be patient even in suffering**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 104:

“1 Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, You are very great ...

10 “He sends the springs into the valleys, They flow among the hills. 11 They give drink to every beast of the field; The wild donkeys quench their thirst. 12 By them the birds of the heavens have their home; They sing among the branches. 13 He waters the hills from His upper chambers; The earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works.

14 He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, And vegetation for the service of man, That he may bring forth food from the earth, 15 And wine that makes glad the heart of man, Oil to make his face shine, And bread which strengthens man's heart.”